

Deanna Fults
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Good afternoon, I want to begin by thanking Alabama Department of Senior Services' commissioner Irene Collins who asked me to speak. My name is Deanna Fults and I currently serve as chief of consumer affairs and antitrust division for AG Troy King. Before my appointment, I served as special assistant to AG Bill Pryor for legislative affairs and special projects. One of my chief responsibilities since coming to the AG's office has been to listen to the needs of Alabamians, advocate on their behalf, and collaborate with public officials to achieve lasting results. I am here this afternoon to pledge my own personal support for the mission of the Older Americans Act.

I have been fortunate over the past couple of months to complete a speaking tour ... from Huntsville to Mobile. The goal of these mini-conferences was to provide seniors with the resources they needed to avoid consumer fraud, to plan their estates, and to understand the mechanisms in place to protect them from physical and financial abuse.

I have been touched by the people I have met and the stories that I have heard from them. As with each group that my division speaks to, we make a point to listen to our seniors in the audience... I've met countless men and women who have shared with me their experiences with telemarketers who prey upon them and fraudulent repairmen that take away the sanctity of their homes.

In Alabama our citizens are our greatest resource, and the AG's office is striving to protect those who are the most vulnerable among us. More specifically, we recognize the sad fact that, of the almost 800,000 senior citizens in Alabama, 15.2 percent of them are living in poverty, which is far above the national average of 10.2%.

I read yesterday that the proportion of the US population over the age of 60 will drastically increase as 77 million baby boomers approach old age in the next 30 years, signaling the need for more long-range planning for health-care and social justice initiatives than ever before. Just as the nation is facing a crisis with baby boomers, Alabama, too, will face its own struggles in the coming years. We have begun to face this challenge head-on, as evidenced by the great level of collaboration within state agencies to educate our citizenry...

From a law enforcement standpoint, we also recognize that elder abuse and exploitation have no boundaries, & cross all racial, social class, gender and geographic lines. We would like to see ...continued support from the federal government for research, training, policy development, multidisciplinary coordination, and other types of support to local prosecutors.

We look to the federal government to empower and support successful efforts at the state and local level by continuing to fund grants that...while requiring that the recipients are using the best practices backed up by evidence of their success... However, it is also incumbent that the federal government strikes a balance when re-authorizing the Older Americans Act. In addition to needing increased funding, states also need greater flexibility to respond to the needs of seniors. This can be done by allowing states broader latitude in transferring funds between the various components of the act, so they can allocate resources for a variety of services based upon the evolving needs and preferences of the individuals and communities that we serve.

Our seniors want to see a renewed commitment to community-based services, and the most frail among them deserve long-term care services when they are at risk for institutionalization. After working their entire lives, the elderly deserve to live out their golden years with the honor, dignity and self-sufficiency that we expect for ourselves.